

Guilt-free gas heating season is anticipated

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ST. GEORGE - As winter's cold weather arrives in St. George, Southern Utah residents do not have to feel guilty about turning on the heater.

"We are not anticipating a rate increase," said Rene Fleming, conservation coordinator for the city of St. George's power department.

Bills for St. George residents could increase if they turn their thermostat to a higher temperature than they did in October and November, but the actual rate for power will stay the same, Fleming said.

Questar Gas customers will have lower rates this winter, said spokesman Chad Jones.

The company is lowering its rates by 9 percent, Jones said.

"That is 29 percent lower than gas costs in 2004," he said.

Rocky Mountain Power will have an increase in costs for power, but customers won't be charged more money until August, said Dave Eskelsen, the company's spokesman.

"The company must get permission to change rates," Eskelsen said. "The Utah Public Service Commission has to OK it."

The process of building a case for the commission takes time, Eskelsen said.

Eskelsen said the company has invested "hundreds of millions" of dollars to generate, transmit and distribute power in Southern Utah, which has demanded more power with the area's growth.

The cost of materials and electricity are also increasing, Eskelsen said.

"The company does invest that money for expansion and new facilities to make sure electricity is as reliable as we can make it," he said.

Though energy prices may stay the same for now, residents can still make small changes to keep their bills low this winter, Fleming said.

She suggests residents keep their thermostat at 68 degrees during the day and lower the temperature to 66 degrees at night.

Some residents can also program their thermostats to lower the building's temperature a few degrees at times when no one is home.

People can also check to make sure vents are unobstructed, Fleming said.

A house should be kept at 65 to 66 degrees if its residents are leaving for a trip, Fleming said.

The Questar Gas company also provides tips to conserve energy on its Web site, www.questargas.com.

Furnaces consume more natural gas than anything else in the home, according to the Web site.

To help lower energy costs, furnace filters should be changed frequently to keep the air flowing, according to the site.

People can also lower the temperature on their water heaters to reduce natural gas costs.
